172

In The Scranton Republican of Wednesday, July 29, 1936 (pp. 16, 30) was published the following article about the village of Underwood:

OLD TIMERS SWAP TALES OF EARLY HISTORY AS UNDERWOOD MARCHES TOWARD ITS DOOM

Stories Depict Village's Birth, Distinguished Career

The Village of Underwood has had its day, and a little town which had a glorious history will soon be just another "Deserted Village"--left behind in the onward march of time and progress.

The death knell has been sounded for the little community by the edict of the Pittston Company that it must be evacuated gradually, it was disclosed Monday. Three families will move out this week, their homes will be boarded up as two houses already have been closed forever.

Other residents have been ordered to move by October 1 at the latest.

And so in the dying community, the old residents swapped tales yesterday of their town which had a glorified birth and a distinguished youthful career.

Life in this wooded section began in 1912, when the Pennsylvania Coal Company built the first model coal colliery on a clearing in the valley at the foot of the Moosic Mountain. Part of the village was in Olyphant and part in Throop. The dividing line ran right down the center of the main street (which, by the way, was paved), and the miners and their families resided in Olyphant, while the officials' homes were in Throop.

A modern schoolhouse was erected in the center of the town. It was ungraded and presided over by a teacher from Olyphant or Throop. On bitter Winter days when snow was several feet deep, one of the officials would send a conveyance into town to bring the teacher to her young charges. Daily the children of the town learned their ABC's and great stress was laid upon the Palmer method of penmanship, arithmetic, spelling and grammar. Students leaving the school for a graded institution of learning were very apt to find they could do compound fractions and carpet a floor, but were a little at a loss as to the capital of Georgia, or who won the French and Indian War. On Sundays, the school became a church, and visiting preachers would deliver the sermon to the older people, while a few of the townsfolk taught Sunday School for the children.

No Stores in Village

There were no stores in this infant village, which received its name when the late F. D. Underwood, then president of the Erie Railroad, visited there shortly after its completion. The townspeople were so impressed with their visitor that they resolved to name their village for him. Approximately 250 hand picked residents peopled the village. They were the miners and the officials of the company together with their families. There were no merchants, bankers, butchers or candlestick makers. Supplies had to be purchased in either Throop or Olyphant. For the convenience of the female portion of the community, a bus ran between Underwood and Throop, meeting the car line in Throop, and proceeding into Scranton, where the women might buy their frills and furbelows.

There was no doctor or nurse, the residents depending for expert medical care upon the practitioners of either of the adjoining boroughs. It was up to the women, in most instances, to render first aid to children or their menfolk hurt in the mines.

Miners' Monthly Rent $6

In the center of the town, two bath houses were built. These were a decided innovation for a mining town, and were for the use of the wives and children of the miners. The first up-to-date wash house every built for a mining town, as for the convenience of the miners. All the houses were electrically lighted from the electric plant at the colliery, and the houses were heated from the company's steam plant. A nominal rent was paid for the houses, and electricity and heat were furnished gratis. Miners paid approximately $6 per month and officials $15 per month rent.

All the streets were paved and there were sidewalks throughout the town, which for a mining village was quite something, when one recalls the abandoned railroad track that provided the main thoroughfare in the bituminous village of Dagis Mines for a great many years.

The village boasted of the first modern colliery, steel constructed, and one of the first modern playgrounds. There were garages for each official, and one large garage at the end of the street for the miners. In the early days of Underwood, Model T Fords caused almost as much consternation as a mine accident. One resident, returning from Throop, counted two hens, two ducks, one dog and a telegraph pole to his credit, in the space of a very short time.

The recreational life of Underwood was also up-to-date. There were tennis courts and a baseball field. One of the popular Saturday afternoon sports was the shooting match, in which women and men alike would vie for the prize of a fat hen or turkey.

The village of Underwood has always been linked inexoriably with the anthracite industry, and is one of the few towns of its kind that had little labor trouble. The mines, at that time, were running in three shifts, day and night, and their was little difficulty between the miners and operators. Of course, there was an occasional shooting, and some upstart would take revenge for a real or fancied grievance by dynamiting an official's home, always with little physical harm to the occupants.

It was an exciting life that Underwood led during its boom stage. There was scarcely a day that there wasn't something, be it a quarrel between a miner and his wife (and the whole town knew about it at once) or something happening in or around the mines.

The history of this mining town would not be quite complete without mentioning the colliery superintendents, in whom a great deal of the authority for running the town was delegated. There were but five of them, the first having been E. C. Weichel, who was followed by William Jeffrey, Fred Beecham, Cort Snyder and Arthur Wrightson, Jr., the present superintendent.

Underwood has entered upon the final stage. By October many homes will be evacuated. And thus ends another chapter in anthracite mining.

Note: The first four lines in this column are here reprinted exactly as they appear in the July 29, 1936 newspaper article. These four lines should, perhaps, read as follows: "In the center of the town, two bath houses were built for the use of the wives and children as for the convenience of the miners. These were the first up-to-date wash houses ever built for a mining town, and were a decided innovation..."